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“Professionalization” or “Proletarianization”: Which Concept Defines the Changes in Teachers’ Work?

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Abstract

In many parts of the world, particularly starting from 1980 a set of transformations is being experienced in the field of education. With these transformations while the meaning and content of the education changes, the teachers who are the most basic actors of education field are expected to keep pace with this change process and to be even active agents of this process. Therefore, it is possible to talk about the fact that some significant changes in education, employment and working conditions of teachers have been taking place in recent times. The discussions in literature in regards to efforts to understand and explain the change and transformations experienced in the profession of teaching are usually based on two main approaches. While in the first approach it is claimed that teachers are being “professionalized” over time, in the latter approach it is claimed that teachers are not professionals no longer, on the contrary, with the transformation process they are increasingly getting deskilled and hence are being “proletarianized”. The aim of this study is that within the axis of profession of teaching and by focusing on theoretical discussions regarding “professionalization” and “proletarianization”, to establish a theoretical framework to understand the changes experienced in teachers’ work.

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1. Introduction

The occupations which had emerged depending on social division of labor and which were important factors in determining people’s social status, life styles and social relations in pre-capitalist societies as well have gained a stronger social meaning with capitalism however they have gone through important changes. With industrial production’s becoming widespread, while a homogenous and substitutable employee mass has been formed from the perspective of the skills required by factory production and craft based occupations have started to fade away on the one hand, on the other hand within the framework of professional specialism required by industrialism new professions have emerged. However, while important changes are being experienced in professions and profession structures within the changing historical and social conditions, founding factors of many professions are becoming subject to transformation.

Depending on the social change dynamics and with the restructuring process experienced in the education, one of the professions going through transformation is teaching. The teachers who are the most important actors of

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education field are expected to keep pace with this change process and to be even active agents of this process. In this period, discussions about the “quality” of the teachers who are in charge of social reproduction of labor power and bringing up citizens have been increasing, as well. With the statement claiming that profession of teaching and teacher education have problems which started in 1980s in the United States and became widespread in many countries in recent times, it is emphasized that profession of teaching should be “professionalized” and developed (Ginsburg and Yeom, 2007). In the change process created through various reforms, social and professional roles and functions of teachers are being redefined.

The efforts directed towards explanation of the change and transformations with different dimensions experienced in professions and profession structures have caused the emergence of theoretical approaches regarding this transformation that can be lined up and classified in different ways, as well. In this study, theoretical discussions in regards to “professionalization” and “proletarianization” have been tackled with various dimensions on the axis of profession of teaching, and by this way a theoretical framework towards understanding the transformation experienced in the profession has been tried to be established.

2. Professionalization Debates and Teaching

Within the framework of trait theory while professions are distinguished from other occupations with respect to traits they have, it is claimed that all the occupations will be professionalized when they gain certain traits which are attributed to professions. (Ginsburg, 1997). In this sense, the “professionalization” is defined as a universal process and expresses occupation’s gaining the status of a profession. The fundamental characteristics that come forward in differentiating a profession from other occupations are high level knowledge obtained as a result of a long education and gathering around a professional organization (Hughes, 1963). In addition to these, determination of duty scopes that can only be fulfilled by professionals and restricting entry conditions to the profession (Freidson, 1988), in order to facilitate this restriction professional bodies’ defining some ethic rules for the execution of the profession and working for public interest (Barber, 1963; Hughes, 1963) are important developments in the process of professionalization.

As Larson (1977) emphasized the “autonomy” however, which to some extent allows the professionals to be insulated from external control and which lets them control the tasks and their behaviors, is one of the most important traits that distinguish a profession from other occupations. According to Freidson (1988) who claims that profession holders have the power to guarantee the future of their own professions, autonomy is ability of professionals to establish control over the jobs. To summarize it, high level systematic knowledge gained through education, having a central professional organization and autonomy in the execution of the profession are the fundamental characteristics defining a profession.

Discussions about whether teaching is a profession or not have been continuing in the various disciplines of social sciences. With a functionalist approach and from the point of traits teaching has, the assessments regarding whether teaching is a profession or a semi-profession constitute the focal point of these discussions. In these studies that follow professionalization thesis, departing from traditional professions like law and medicine it is emphasized that teaching is a semi-profession that progresses in the way of professionalization and it will be professionalized when it fulfills the traits that a profession requires (Etzioni, 1969; Hoyle, 1982; Hargreaves, 2000; Lortie, 1975). According to Johnson (1972) however, professionalization is not a process that the various occupations will undergo when they have some traits rather it expresses a historical process where some occupations take form in a certain period. Ginsburg (1997) who takes a step from this point of view emphasizes that teachers have experienced professionalization in different countries in various historical periods.

Hargreaves (2000), who indicates that while professionalization process of teaching contains some differences it has common characteristics in Anglo-Saxon world, analyzes the historical development of this process in four periods. He defines end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century when teaching emerged as a job as “pre-professional age”, the “welfare state” years after 1960 when status of teachers improved as “the age of autonomous professional”, the post-1980 years when individual autonomy became unsustainable and many reforms were

experienced as “age of collegial autonomy”. According to Hargreaves who was inspired by D. Hargreaves and defined the professionalism that developed in this period as “new” because of its not being autonomous and individualistic, the last period is the postmodern or post professionalization period. It would be the teachers who would decide how this flexible period will be and how the professionalization process of teachers will continue.

In the professionalization processes of occupations, historical and social conditions play important roles and the same profession can develop in different ways in different societies. McClelland (1990) mentions that while Anglo-Saxon type professionalization approaches make emphasis on autonomy and the control over profession market, they remain insufficient in explaining historical and cultural factors in the professionalization process. Professionalization can develop by following different paths. One of these paths is “professionalization from within” of the professionals by means of the culture they created and the other one indicates the intervention of state and other forces in the development of a profession and called “professionalization from above” (McClelland, 1990).[†] Evetts (2009), who makes a similar differentiation based on development differences of professions defines the development of professionalism within the two ideal type axes as “organized professionalism” (professionalization from above) and “occupational professionalism” (professionalization from within). With its enterprise control approach, the organized professionalism brings along an increased standardization in the procedures and practices of the work as well as measurability of performance and external arrangements. Occupational professionalism however, states a solidarity based autonomy among the colleagues, and a situation where employees have authority and job control which are facilitated in line with ethical principles provided by professional institutes and establishments.

When we assess these professionalization related differentiations within the context of professionalization of teachers, it can be stated that as a profession which develops in the shade of state in many of the countries, the teaching can be defined as “organized professionalism” or with McClelland’s terminology professionalization from above. In addition to this, it is necessary to emphasize that the differentiation that Evetts makes has similar characteristics to “traditional” and “new” professionalism differentiation which states the experienced change in the meaning of professionalism. It is seen that the “new professionalism” (see Robertson, 1996; Ünal, 2005) approach which takes form within the axes of standardization in the profession, being measurable and external arrangement and control are put into practice through changes that are aimed to be realized in the profession of teaching in recent times and this process is called professionalization.

There are also other approaches that interpret the changes experienced in the professions as not professionalization but on the contrary, as process of “deprofessionalization”. For example, according to Haug (1996) who claims that professionalism in society is increasingly vanishing, the professionals have been losing their monopoly on professional knowledge, their image that they work for the interest of public, their power of establishing rules and hence their prestige in the eyes of public and confidence placed in them. The technological advancements which make easier to reach the knowledge also accelerates the deprofessionalization process. Upon change of work order at school the increasing of monitoring and supervision over teachers and teachers’ losing their autonomy and status in the society have been interpreted as teachers’ deprofessionalization (Ginsburg and Magehad, 2009; Grace, 1987). On the other hand, with a different approach the transformations experienced in teaching are defined not as professionalization or deprofessionalization but as proletarianization process.

[†] This differentiation McClelland makes is similar to the differentiation that Larson (1977) makes between “autonomous” and “heteronom” forms of professionalism. Larson who emphasizes that professionalization have followed different paths in Anglo-Saxon world and Europe, underlines that state interventions have blocked development of professionalization on its own accord in Europe.

3. Proletarianization Approach and Teaching

With the increasing industrialization and transformation that craftsmen went through in 19th century and the transformation that professionals experienced in the 20th century when capitalism gained a monopolistic outlook and industrialization intensified, a parallelism is established and profession related transformations that professionals went through is called “proletarianization” (Oppenheimer, 1973; Larson, 1980). Among the professionals who work self-employed an increasing trend of salaried work is observed starting from second half of the 20th century. Notwithstanding this, as a result of occupation’s “taylorization” from the point of management, standardization and bureaucratic controls, salaried employees like teachers are increasingly becoming subject to more supervision and they have been losing their autonomy. Although there are various studies that deal with transformations in the professions from the perspective of proletarianization, the most comprehensive and path-breaking study about white collar employees’ proletarianization is Braverman’s (1974) book titled “Labor and Monopoly Capital”. Based on labor process theory developed by Braverman, changes and transformations experienced in many professions have been analyzed. And one of these professions is teaching, professionalization process of which is controversial.

Although the discourse that teachers got professionalized becomes widespread within the framework of reforms realized to enhance the “quality” of teaching, the studies showing these reforms made them deskilled within the bureaucratic structure of the school hence proletarianized them have increased starting from 1980s. In these studies, educators are defined as workers and schools are defined as workplaces where workers and citizens get prepared for the later processes (Connell, 1995; Ginsburg, 1988; Reid, 2003; Smyth, 2001). In these approaches based on “labour process theory” which Braverman developed starting from Marx’s labour process analyses, it is stated that by using Taylor’s “scientific principles” planning and application have been separated and thus intensification, deskilling and proletarianization have been experienced in teaching (Apple, 1986; Densmore, 1987; Giroux, 1988; Harris, 1982; Ozga & Lawn, 1981, 1988). Taking the totality of the task into pieces, improved division of labour, advancements in technology, after transferring the knowledge and power to management employees’ losing autonomy about how to perform the work i.e., their losing control over work lead to occupation’s becoming unqualified and also proletarianization of the employee. In this sense the proletarianization process experienced in teaching, together with expanding curriculum packages and management processes, involves teachers’ losing their relative autonomy and becoming technicians (Apple, 1986).

The first studies about teachers’ proletarianization have emerged as a critique of professionalization thesis. In the professionalization thesis, by looking at some traits that the teachers had, a discussion about whether teaching was a profession or not was being carried out. In these studies however, teachers’ losing their control over the work and their various skills have been interpreted as proletarianization. However, in addition to deprofessionalization the process that has been gone through was subject to a wider analysis based on political economy.

Within the framework of labour process analysis of teaching, in the studies about proletarianization of teachers, dealing with teachers as the ones who passively accept the applied policies and as passive carriers of the structure has become subject matter of critiques. Ozga and Lawn (1988) have emphasized that in the studies including their first studies which are based on labour process theory and focus on teachers’ proletarianization, because more emphasis was given to structural conditions the teachers were tackled as the ones who were caught up in inevitable process of deskilling and this situation led to determinism. Reid (2003) states that the reason why labour process theory surfaces as deterministic is because Braverman’s proletarianization thesis which is used in education literature has not focused on reasons and ways of controlling the teachers but focused on scientific method and deskilling and intensification that are effects of it. Because deskilling and intensification at occupation is a result rather than a reason.

Reid (2003) who analyzes education starting from labour process theory, emphasizes that in order to understand the transformation being experienced in education and profession of teaching one should concentrate on reasons but not on results, therefore in such an analysis the starting point should be taking the control into the centre. When we understand why and how teachers are controlled then we can understand why and how the transformation taking place in the profession of teaching is realized. It is possible to gather reasons of state’s controlling the teacher labour

force under various headings (Carter and Stevenson, 2009; Reid, 2003; Rikowski, 2002). The first one of them is that teachers assume duty both in social reproduction of necessary labour power and legitimization of social relations that are based on inequalities. The effort of realizing this production process at a minimum cost also emerges as another control reason. On the other hand, teachers also have the potential of opposing and resisting to this process. Therefore, both because of strengthening the value creation shape of future labour power as well as hindering its alternative development and restricting the space of critical perspective as much as possible, the teachers are controlled in various ways. Although control over education and teachers was always important, particularly in the new era of capitalism starting from 1980s it has become more functional and necessary. As Robertson (2007) emphasized, within the framework of “knowledge-based economy” there is currently an epistemic and ontological change in society, education is increasingly becoming tighter-linked to economy and roles given to teachers in this direction have been changing. Through different employment forms, career and compensation systems, a new organization and management structure and with the broadest sense of the word through a new life culture and practices, the increasing control mechanisms cause significant changes to take place in the profession of teaching (see Ball, 1998; Gewirtz, 1997; Mahony and Hextall, 2000; Robertson, 2007) and they increasingly eliminate its difference from other jobs.

4. Conclusion

It is possible to analyze the transformation taking place in teaching on the basis of different theoretical approaches. Despite they bring along different explanations, in both professionalization and proletarianization approaches there is the thesis that teaching differs from other jobs with its some characteristics. In the first approach, it is claimed that although it differentiates with respect to social conditions the professionalization process has been continuing in some professions and teachers are increasingly becoming more professional. However, attentions should be drawn to the fact that the experienced professionalization is not taking place on the axis of “traditional professionalism” and factors defining professionalism have been changing. In the second approach however, it is claimed that in a general sense this process which is called “new professionalism” is actually a process of proletarianization. On the other hand, instead of asking whether the observed transformation process is professionalization or proletarianization, from the perspective of understanding the transformation process it seems more meaningful to ask why and how the teachers are controlled and what changes this control process causes.

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